

HONDURAS/U.S. BROKAW: Heavy fighting was reported today between those U.S.-backed rebels and Nicaraguan forces along the Honduran border. Honduras now is at the center of U.S. policy in the Central America, and Fred Francis reports tonight on the American buildup there.

FRANCIS: The American embassy here in Honduras is now the second-largest in the world. The diplomats, soldiers and spies here are managing a policy of containing communism in Central America and, partly in defiance of Congress, they have built and are planning a military network within Honduras the likes of which has not been seen since Vietnam. The centerpiece of the buildup strategy is this 13,000-foot airbase at *Comellagua, where rockets, bombs and ammunition will be prepositioned for tactical airstrikes into El Salvador and Nicaragua if the situation in those countries threatens U.S. security, according to a senior administration official. For over a year, the Pentagon has dotted Honduras with other military contingency sites. At Puerta *Lampira: an improved airfield. At El Aguacate: a long runway to be paved. At *La Saba: \$8 million for airport reconstruction. At San Lorenzo: a dirt airfield and a planned ammo dump. At Puerto Castillo on the north coast: future plans for a \$160 million port, as well as plans for two more dirt fields at *Hamastran in the south and *Chuchiagua in the west. At Trujillo: a training base and a longer runway. At *Cerra la Mone: an Air Force radar unit, and a longer-range radar unit on Tiger Island, now manned by 150 Marines. Administration sources say the mountain radar site at Tiger Island will be critical if Salvador becomes desperate, though sources said the president already has rejected U.S. air power to help the Salvadoran army. But they added U.S. combat air support for El Salvador is possible after the president's re-election if communist guerrillas there appear to be winning. The Honduran airfields would also be used if the military in Nicaragua decides to import MiG fighters now in Cuba. A Pentagon official said, 'The President won't hesitate to order American air strikes.' The Pentagon says the buildup is prudent military planning and that if American air power from here is not needed in El Salvador and Nicaragua, then the United States must still have locations to replace Guantanamo in Cuba and U.S. facilities in Panama by the end of the century, and this country is ideal. Fred Francis, NBC News, Tegulcigalpa, Honduras.